

ESSAY

ON THE

CHARACTER OF JESUS CHRIST,

CONSIDERED AS AN EVIDENCE OF THE TRUTH OF
THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

BY

REV. J. CARMICHAEL, M.A.,

Minister of St. Andrew's Church, Markham, Ontario.

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The following essay is published in compliance with a resolution passed by the Young People's Association of Whitevale, before whom it was read in January last.

MARKHAM, March, 1882.

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THE character of our Lord is one of the most important subjects that can occupy the thoughts of a Christian.

As a whole, it presents one of the most striking evidences of the truth of that religion which he came to establish ; whether we consider it as the fulfilment of prophecies which were uttered hundreds of years previous to his appearance in our world ; or, as the exhibition of a moral character so incomparably superior to all that this earth can produce, or even the best and wisest men could summon up to their imaginations. The character of our Lord is not only worthy of being considered, on account of the evidence which it affords of the truth of the Christian revelation, but also on account of the personal advantages which may flow from the contemplation of the most exalted pattern of excellence which can be placed before the mind of a human being. The great object of the Christian religion is the restoration of man to the favour of God, and one of its most powerful means of assimilating our character to that of the God whom we worship is setting before us the example of the man Christ Jesus. Indeed the very perfection of Christian character is the being conformed to his image ; and the great aim of a Christian life while on earth is to have the same mind in him which was also in Christ Jesus.

Even in heaven itself it is a knowledge of the character of the Saviour which gives full completion to the sanctified nature of the Christian: "It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." Although then, the object of the present essay is to consider the character of Christ as an evidence of the truth of revelation, on account of its superiority to everything of human origin; and although it be acknowledged that we are unable to present a view so striking of the virtues which adorned his character as the simple narratives of the gospel exhibit, yet, if by writing on such a subject we are led to pay more attention to the facts of the Christian history, and to fix our minds more steadily on the leading features of our great exemplar, the labour will be amply rewarded.

I. Then in considering the character of Jesus Christ, we see the most spotless purity. When at the well of Samaria, the disciples brought bread, in order to present it to their master, who was fatigued and spent with his journey, Jesus, intent on the great design of his mission, refused, at the time, to partake of that which the attention of his friends had provided. When the disciples marvelled at his refusal, he said, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of. My meat is to do the will of him that sent me." Thus we see that the will of God was the rule, by which the Messiah guided his conduct. Obedience to his Father in heaven was his continual aim. The law of God which is pure and reaches to the inmost thoughts of the heart, was the ever present standard of duty with him who came to redeem his people from all iniquity. To be pure in heart is as necessary for the servant of him who trieth the reins and the heart, as the exhibition of external rectitude of conduct. We find the Saviour often insisting on the spiritual

nature of the commandments of God ; and in the sermon on the mount, he explains the divine precepts, so as for ever to condemn the hypocrite and all those who conceive that outward decency can ever atone for the abominations of the heart. Thus the rule to which Jesus, while on earth, professed to adhere, and which he enjoins on all his followers, is the commandment of the Lord which is pure.

The question then is, did he act up to this infallible standard in all that he did and said ; or is there anything in his history that would lead us to suspect his failure in regard to the purity which the law requires ?

Many of the actions and sayings of our Lord are recorded ; both those actions which he performed before all the world, and those which he transacted in his most secret retirement with his chosen friends. The discourses also which he delivered in public, and the conversations which he held in the seclusions of the most confidential intimacy, are narrated by four writers in the most unvarnished manner ; and it may be asked, is there one word that escapes from his lips, or one action that he performs that can by any means lead us to suspect the smallest deviation from that purity which he professed to practise. Nay, is there not much to persuade us that purity in heart and life was the characteristic of the man Christ Jesus. A delusion, however, on this subject is apt to steal into the mind, and that is, that in considering the character of Christ we are disposed to impute to it some of the sinful imperfections of our nature, because in it we see the infirmities which belong to the bodily constitution of frail humanity. But making an effort to lay aside this feeling, let us ask, does not the recorded history of Jesus Christ lead us to imagine the perfection of a sinless human being. Where is the smallest

trace of that sinful ambition which leads to the sacrifice of the good of all around to the aggrandizement of self? It was not in the refusal of all earthly honour. Where the traces of envy and malice? Surely not in the kindness and condescension with which he treated every good man. Where the traces of revenge? Not in the meekness with which he bore the malevolence of his enemies. On the contrary, in the words and actions of Jesus Christ we find the proofs of absolute severance from all the hostile and stormy passions of our nature. Purity also from every sensual defilement is marked in all that he said and did; and with the strictest truth it may be said, "he was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners."

It ought also to be remarked, that this character is not the picture of mere description. It is an easy thing for any mere declaimer to draw the outlines of a supposed perfection; to say that any one is free from every vice and adorned with every virtue; and that an impure or unworthy thought never entered into the mind of the subject of his praise.* In fact, we know, from experience, that certificates of this general nature may be had in all countries and in all ages; that they are as worthless as they are vague, and have been applied to men who had no title to the name of virtuous in the lowest acceptation of the word. It may be also remarked in passing, that sceptics are the men, of all others, who indulge most in giving high-flown general characters of their friends, without facts to support them.

But not so is the character of Jesus Christ. It is built on minute facts and sayings which have been treasured up by those who witnessed them, who never attempted a general description of the assemblage of qualities which existed in the man Jesus. The character as a whole, is left to be inferred by

every reader ; and what is more, it cannot be missed by the most common understanding.

It may be said, however, that the supposed purity of our Lord's character may arise from the disciples leaving out whatever would militate against the good name of their master. We say the supposition is simply impossible. To have done so, while they narrated so many minute circumstances, they would have required to be pure themselves. We find often in panegyrics, where nothing is meant to be admitted, even although it should belong to the characters described, which would bring the least discredit on the subject of praise, that the writers, from a want of perfect moral feeling in themselves, detail facts which would be better concealed, and which they would conceal, if they had judgment to perceive their true bearing on the character of their friend. Thus we find Xenophon, in order that he may describe a dialogue of his master, relating that Socrates, along with some of his disciples, visited a famous courtesan of the day. This is a fact quite inconsistent with the dignity of the philosopher, and utterly subversive of the character of the son of Sophroniscus as a teacher of pure morality ; although Xenophon, owing to his imperfect notions on the subject, was quite unconscious that he had said anything to wound the reputation of the wisest of the heathen philosophers. It is to be remarked here, also, that there was no occasion for introducing the fact into the *Memorabilia* at all ; as they are composed on very general principles. What an exhibition, then, would he have made of the character of Socrates, if he had entered into as minute a detail of facts as the disciples of our Lord. Thus we see that if there had been any circumstances in the Saviour's life which were not strictly moral, they would not have been concealed if they tallied with the

morality of the day which prevailed in Judea, and the disciples would have been quite unconscious of injuring his reputation in narrating them. The fact is that the purity of our Lord's character is not only superior to that of the disciples themselves, but to anything which they could have conceived, and nothing but prejudice could ever make us suppose that the character of Christ is the figment of the human imagination.

II. The character of our Lord was not only free from every fault, but possessed every virtue, and displayed every perfection.

In order that we may consider this part of the subject without running out into too great length, we shall make some remarks on the two great classes of human virtue—devotion to God and benevolence towards man, which include all the others.

In regard to his devotion to God, we remark that in all things the Saviour was to be a pattern of righteousness. When he was tempted by Satan, we find him using the same mode of defence which is suited for each individual of those whom he came to save. It was the word of God which is the sword of the Spirit that he wielded against the attacks of the tempter. When Satan showed our Lord all the kingdoms of the world in an instant of time, and said, "All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me," "Jesus said unto him, it is written, thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." Through his whole life he submitted to all the ceremonial appointments of the law, and fulfilled all righteousness. Prayer to his Father in heaven was his daily practice; he even spent whole nights in secret devotion. But it was not in acts of worship alone that his devotion to God was conspicuous. No hardship was too great to be encountered if it was

the will of his father that it should be endured. Resignation in every circumstance was the practice of Jesus of Nazareth, and in his last agony, when he prayed if it were possible that this cup might pass from him, "nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done," were his words. Where shall we find an example of devotion to God so uniform, so ardent, and so unreserved? No contempt of men, no suffering in the discharge of his arduous conflict, could ever lead him to distrust the wisdom of the appointment of heaven, or cause him to slacken in his zeal in performance of the work which was given him to do.

Benevolence towards men in the highest degree, as well as devotion towards God, was found in the Saviour. Here, again, we must call to mind that the character does not rest on general description, but on recorded facts. The benevolence of Christ was not of that general kind, falsely called philosophical, which enters into lofty speculation on the good of the whole, and evaporates without ever being formed into a real wish for the happiness of the human race, and altogether vanishes when brought to the touchstone of being brought into contact with the distress of individuals. With the exception of those actions which he performed as a propitiation for sin, the benevolence of Jesus Christ was such as was fitted for an example to every human being. Those who were blessed with his society shared in the effects of his goodness, and this without impairing his regards for the whole race. His benevolence took that range which God in his providence and word clearly points out as the proper mode of a human being exerting his benevolent designs. His relatives, his friends, his acquaintances, his fellow citizens, his countrymen, and all his brethren of mankind, each in their proper degree, came in for their share of his attention. Those who were most nearly connected with

him were the objects of his tenderest regards, while he was ready to embrace every opportunity of doing good to all. By his example he shows the absurdity of that sentimental benevolence which pretends to love the race while it neglects the duty which is owing to individuals. At the same time he exposes the extreme selfishness of those who, under a pretence of providing for their own, are callous to the sufferings of a world lying in misery. As proofs of what we have advanced a few instances will suffice. Consider the respect which he paid to his parents, and the tender solicitude which he evinced for his sorrowing mother, when the burden of his own griefs was at the heaviest. Consider the love which he showed for his disciples, and especially towards the close of his wonderful career. He was as a father to them through life, and at death he blessed them, and comforted them, with words to which there is no parallel in all the accents of kindness which were ever expressed since the foundation of the world. Consider, also, his attachment to the beloved disciple, and his friend Lazarus. Indeed, there is not a more touching narrative in all the annals of humanity than the description of the events connected with the death of him whom Jesus loved. With what confidence do the sisters unbosom their griefs; and with what feeling does Jesus listen to the voice of this sorrow. And when, in the simplicity of a gospel narrative, it is said, *Jesus wept*, what heart can be unmoved by the tenderness of him, who had power to heal the sick, and to raise the dead, and whom even the winds and sea obeyed. Surely here is one who can sympathize with us in all our infirmities. The benevolence of Jesus towards his fellow-citizens and countrymen was manifested in the labours which he endured in their service, and in the mira-

cles which he performed on all who had need of his healing powers.

The benevolence of Jesus, although conspicuous in the relief of bodily distress, and in the interchange of those affections which bind man to man, while he tabernacles on earth, could not be satisfied without the interests of the soul were considered. The great end of his teaching, and of all his miracles, was to lead men back to God, from whom they had revolted, and to shew them the way, the truth and the life. Even his enemies were the objects of his pity ; and in his last and great struggle, his language is, " Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." On considering the whole character of Jesus Christ, every candid inquirer must admit, that benevolence so enlarged in its range and so persevering in its endeavours was never seen on earth. It only requires a faithful perusal of the New Testament to be convinced that the benevolence of Jesus was of the highest possible kind, and entirely beyond the power of humanity to attain.

III. In the character of Christ we behold the most various characters combined. In his intercourse with men, we find him temperate in all things, yet cheerful and willing to encourage by his presence the pleasures of social life. He was ardent in fulfilling the work which was given him to do, but, at the same time, calm in every situation, whether he was the object of censure or of applause. He was the messenger of truth, but still meek and lowly in his deportment. He was kind to all, but no favour to the person could blind him to their faults. He was religious, and much given to devotion ; yet he never failed in active duty. He was simple in his words, yet prudent in all his conduct. These are qualities which we call opposite, because in frail humanity we seldom see them combined.

The temperance of some is apt to produce a want of social kindness. Ardour is often the occasion of indiscretion and precipitancy. A rigid adherence to truth is not unfrequently accompanied with austere and rigid manners. Prudence is often accompanied with cunning. And, in the world in which we live, how often are active pursuits made an excuse for the neglect of the duties of religion ; and on the other hand, the duties of prayer and of pious meditation made the pretexts of retiring from the discharge of duties which the providence and Word of God point out as binding on all. In truth, if we look around us in the world, we shall find the virtues of the best but ill assorted and extremely partial in their influence. If we see the same man at different times, we can scarcely recognise the lineaments of the same character ; so disjointed are the best endeavours of the most improved men. Or, if there be a continued sameness of character, it presents itself often when circumstances require another kind of temper.

But in Jesus Christ we find the same character throughout ; consistent with itself in every display of its excellence, and every virtue ready to show itself in proper degree, and in proper time and place. That Jesus who joined in the festivities of the marriage feast, and made his beginning of miracles in supplying the deficiencies of the entertainment of the happy circle, is the same with him who endured privations of every kind in doing the will of his Father, and enjoined a life of self-denial on all his disciples. If we admire the zeal of the Saviour in journeying from city to city, thronged by the people, and fatigued by his travelling, we see the same character when he is calm amid the hosannas of the multitude, or questioned before the tribunal of the Roman governor. In fact, his zeal is consistent with his calmness, and his calmness never betrays any defi-

ciency of proper feeling. There is a unity also in his piety and in his active endeavours ; he prays when he performs his miracles, as at the tomb of Lazarus ; and, on the other hand, when we have access to his private devotion, we find the objects of his mission were uppermost, as we discover by the words which he spoke to his sorrowing disciples when he was about to leave the scene of his sufferings, of which the following quotations may shew the general spirit : " Father I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am ; that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me, for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world." In truth, every quality which could adorn human nature was found in the man Christ Jesus. There was no opposition of virtues in him ; for all harmonized in producing the character of him who extorted approbation from the lips of his enemies, and in whom God himself declared that he was well pleased.

IV. In the character of Christ there is a wisdom displayed such as was never before exhibited on earth. That he knew intimately the principles of human nature may be gathered from his history, although we altogether leave out of sight the assertion of the sacred historian, " That he knew what was in man." Moral science is that which the revelation of God claims as peculiarly its own. Classification, or the reducing of a science to its elemental principles, is the highest effort of human genius. But where in the writings of all the philosophers that ever existed, shall we discover, on the subject of morals, a classification so complete as that which is exhibited in the ten commandments. In vain do we look for such a display in the writings of the sages of antiquity. In comparison of the light which shines in the Word of God on this momentous subject, the splendour of heathen reason becomes faint and deceitful in

the light which it affords. But Jesus Christ could shed additional light on that which already transcended the unaided powers of human genius. He could so explain and enforce the law of God as to make his instructions be called emphatically a new commandment. Well might it be asked, whence has this man wisdom? Is not this the carpenter's son? And the inquiry is as important at this day as when our Lord was on the earth. Whence hath this man wisdom? Is this not Jesus, the Jew, the Nazarene? Is not this he who was crucified under the governorship of Pontius Pilate? Or, in the words of Tacitus: "Is not this he who was the author of a despicable superstition?" Whence, we again ask, had this man the wisdom that he could in a few sentences declare more valuable truth than ever was discovered by all the sages of antiquity, and that in a science on which they had prided themselves above all others. A remarkable feature in his mission also is, that he required no long reasoning to arrive at his conclusions, but, with the glance of intuition, could arrive at truths which were never brought to light by the most laborious and vaunted investigations of philosophy. To him the science of morals was as plain as if he had been the original author of all its decrees, and the workings of human nature were as open to his view as if he had been the framer of the constitution of man. It is worthy also of particular remark that in his simple declaration there is an authority independent of his character as a divine messenger, which none of the precepts of philosophy could ever acquire, even when fortified with the profoundest reasoning. We have only to take a few examples to establish what we have said. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth," is a truth, the longer we consider it the more we are satisfied of its truth; as the proud heart can never be

satisfied ; but the heart of the meek and lowly is ready to give thanks for every blessing it secures ; and we all know that the man who is in a state to give thanks can never be unhappy. "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake," is a truth, the moment it is stated, none can deny, and yet none but Jesus ever published it. His tracing of morals to their first principles is also remarkable, or rather, we should say his declaration of these principles. "Ye have heard," says he, "that it hath been said by them of old time, thou shalt not kill, but I say unto you that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment."—And again, "From within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adultery, fornication, etc. All these evil things come from within and defile the man." It would far exceed the limit of our essay to do justice to this part of our subject ; but we cannot forbear remarking that the doctrines of our Lord, in regard to prayer and providence, to human responsibility and future judgment, as far transcend the wisdom of the wise, as the matured wisdom of age and of intellect surpasses the feeble lisplings of the infant, whose sounds are as void of meaning as its mind is destitute of knowledge.

Besides the wisdom of our Lord so far exceeding the wisdom of antiquity, another circumstance which makes it still more conspicuous is the marvellous folly and extravagance of those in Christian times who have chosen to dispute the claims of the Gospel. Philosophy, in the first ages of the Christian Church, in its rage for opposing the revelation of the Bible, upheld superstition in all its forms ; nay, employed magical incantations and false miracles to support the interests of idolatry ; and so besotted are modern sceptics that they make some of these deluded men the objects of their praise, and still dare

maintain their own pretensions to superior wisdom and freedom from vulgar prejudice. Thus Gibbon, instead of a history, writes a panegyric of the apostate Julian ; and although, on his own shewing, we can perceive that Julian was the most superstitious of human beings, yet this renowned historian calls him not only a virtuous but a philosophic prince, and at the close of his account of his remarkable reign, adds, with an effrontery which none but a sceptic could use in such circumstances, "Philosophy," says he, "can boast (and perhaps it is no more than the boast of philosophy) that her gentle hand is able to eradicate from the human mind the latent and deadly principle of fanaticism." But it is not only the philosophers of the first centuries of Christianity, but modern philosophers, who have, in the course of Divine Providence, been allowed to shew the extent of their folly in opposing revealed truth. In latter times, in their zeal against Christ, they sapped the foundations of all morality, and by the adoption of their principles by multitudes who followed their delusions, human nature was exhibited in an aspect of ferocity that had never before been witnessed. Truly it may be said of false philosophers, as well as of the votaries of a false church, God hath sent them strong delusion that they may believe a lie. If men will reject the wisdom which shines in every word the Saviour uttered, they shall not do it with impunity. Opposition to truth hardens the mind and blinds the understanding, so that the little which a man hath is taken away by the workings of his own perversity. Thus we see that in the character of Christ there is a wisdom which far excels that of all men. The reasonings of heathen philosophers are altogether set aside by the light of the Gospel, and modern sceptics only increase their folly in their attempts to overturn the truth of God, and in their pre-

tensions to superior wisdom and liberality. In all their endeavours they have shewn to the world that there are no men so bigotted and fanatical as thorough-paced sceptics. At this day the wisdom of Christ and the folly of his enemies is more manifest than at any former period. Is this the fate of imposture? Do false pretensions become more confirmed as the world becomes more enlightened?

V. In the character of Christ we perceive a habitual elevation of mind. With the character which we have described, elevation in all circumstances is perfectly consistent; nay, we cannot conceive so many excellences united without an elevation of spirit beyond anything that can be seen on earth. By elevation of spirit we mean not that pride which often attends the union of many great talents in mere human beings; a feeling which leads to the contempt of others, and often blinds to the very means of attaining the ends at which its ambition aims. Many are the melancholy instances of the ruin which an ill-timed self-ambition brought on its possessors. It was this which took away the judgment they previously possessed, and overwhelmed in destruction an Alexander, a Cæsar, and a Bonaparte before the schemes were completed which they considered necessary to their glory. The elevation which we contemplate in the Saviour was the very reverse of all this. It arose from a calm consideration of the greatness of the work in which he was engaged, and from a certain conviction of the truth of all that he assumed. From his first appearance in public to the last moment he tabernacled among men, we see the movements of a being who had higher ends in view, and with greater power to put them into execution, than ever were beheld in any of the sons of men. Even when a child, although submissive to his parents, we find him asserting the preroga-

tive of him who was commissioned by God himself: "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business!" When he began his public ministry, and we find his forerunner doing him homage, can we perceive the smallest impropriety in Jesus accepting this testimony to his mission, although John was a prophet and more than a prophet. Nay, the exclamation of the Baptist, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world," is in perfect keeping, when addressed to him who had power to heal the sick and to cast out devils with a word. In the submission of Jesus to the ministry of the Baptist, we also discover the same dignity as when he receives the respect which was due to His character. When John says that he had need to be baptized of Jesus, our Lord does not deny the truth of his opinion, but says, "suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness;" thus he submits to the ordinance, but never forgets for a moment that he was Lord of him who was to administer the sacred rite.

In all his intercourse with the people he displayed the same superiority of character. "He speaketh with authority and not as the Scribes" was the remark of the multitude themselves. He was the first being upon earth who could speak with authority in his own name, and heaven bear witness to the truth of what he said. The prophets prefaced their declarations with saying "thus saith the Lord," but the language of the Son is, "verily, verily, I say unto you." Mild and affable wherever he went, but whether with the disciples or in the presence of his bitterest enemies, there was something in the deportment of our Lord who overawed all who approached him. What must have been the dignity of that individual who, without tumult, could drive from the courts of the temple the thous-

ands of selfish creatures, who at the feast of the Passover polluted the house of God with their merchandize. Had any other dared interrupt their unhallowed practices he would have been torn in pieces. Indeed, wherever he went and in whatever circumstances he was placed, he considered himself as the messenger of Heaven, whose mission not all the powers of hell could interrupt. "My hour is not yet come," was his answer to the trembling disciples. "I have power to lay down my life and I have power to take it again," was language which was perfectly consistent with the character of him who uttered it.

How elevated must his conduct have been before the chief priests and the Roman governor. Surely there must have been something more than human in the behaviour of Jesus Christ, which could make an unprincipled Roman hesitate to give up a single individual for the preservation of the public peace; especially when we consider that this happened in a land and at a time when cruelty and oppression were the order of the day, and the sacrifice of the lives of hundreds, to the quelling of the slightest sedition, were events of every day occurrence. "My Kingdom is not of this world," if uttered in ordinary circumstances, and by an ordinary person, would have called down the derision of every spectator; yet these were the words which led Pilate the more earnestly to seek to release him.

How wonderful also is the sight of a poor, persecuted Galilean speaking words which were to console his people to the end of time; instituting an ordinance which was to commemorate his death to the latest period, as one of the greatest events the world ever saw; and in the immediate prospect of death, addressing such language as the following to the God of heaven and earth: "Father I will that they also whom thou

hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me, for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world." The same character is supported to the end. In the garden, when he says, "whom seek ye?" and on the cross when he cries with a loud voice, "it is finished." Does it not become us when we consider the exalted character which Christ sustained from the cradle to the grave, seriously to consider how great this Man was?

Thus then we have considered the character of Christ in that exalted view which characterizes all his proceedings, whether we consider his relation to God or to man; in that union of qualities which never meet in any of the corrupt children of Adam; in that wisdom by which he never spake as man spake; and in that elevation of mind which suited such excellence alone. Is it then possible to conceive that a being clothed with virtue and excellences of every description could deceive those who are willing to give credit to his sayings? Is it consistent with spotless purity to defile the conscience with deceit and falsehood; with the most exalted devotion to God, to establish will worship and idolatry; with benevolence to men to mislead them in their most important concerns; with the greatest wisdom, to establish a groundless superstition; and can we suppose the greatest elevation of soul, compatible with the meanness of passing himself off for a being which he was not, and claiming honours to which he had not the smallest title? Such suppositions are utterly incredible. If we admit the truth of the records which the Apostles have given, we must admit the justice of the claims which are advanced, although we had no other evidence than the veracity of Jesus himself who urges them.

There is no way of avoiding the conclusion, but denying the

truth of the details of the life of our Lord as given by the evangelists ; and to assert that no such person ever existed ; and that the character which is exhibited in the Gospels is the mere fiction of those who wrote them. But a very little consideration will convince us that this hypothesis is altogether untenable, and that the invention of the history of Jesus was beyond the power of the disciples. We admit that there are some qualities which may be described by those who do not possess them. Thus, for example, a person may declaim about courage, and even invent circumstances in which it might be exercised and all the while himself be a coward, and on the first occasion of real danger abandon the companions who were hurried into action by the power of his eloquence. We know that this was the case with the greatest orator of antiquity. A person also may write much about feeling, and invent cases to call it forth, and yet may be destitute in a great measure of practical sympathy for distress. We grant that in moral subjects also, beautiful general descriptions may be given, and feigned characters may in many points be well supported, in the writings of those who are worthless themselves, who neither fear God nor regard man. But here our admission must stop, and we assert without the fear of contradiction, that it is altogether impossible for a human being to raise up a perfect moral character on minute particulars of action, and of private and public discourse, without the writer himself being a perfect moral character. That this is the case we have already remarked, when speaking of purity of heart ; and we find the truth confirmed by all writers of novels, dramas, and poems. What are the best characters of Homer but pictures of the savage morality of which the writer approved. Even the Cyrus of Xenophon, with all his worth, is no paragon of excellence ; and

the pious Æneas himself, of the Mantuan bard, is a monster of deceit and cruelty.

The thing is notorious, that previous to the history of our Lord no account of the actions and the sayings of a perfect moral being, in duties to God and man, ever appeared or could appear; and what is still more striking, no such history has ever shewn itself since his appearance in the world, although the numberless writers of fiction which rise up in every age, had the advantage of such a copy before them.

In all feelings which are merely the workings of nature, without requiring perfections of morals, men may be found equal to the task of framing a fictitious character which all must admire. But to form a fictitious moral character, by relating minute particulars of private and public life, the writer himself must have a perfect idea of moral worth. And can we suppose for a moment that the apostles of our Lord, illiterate and obscure as they were, could do what was beyond the power of Homer, Xenophon, Virgil, and all the sages of Greece and Rome, and beyond the power of all the genius that has appeared in the world since the Christian era; and that they could rise altogether above the age in which they lived, and give us a picture of perfection, altogether at variance with the notions in which they had been educated. The supposition is altogether incredible. If the apostles had written a fictitious character in which they wished to give us their ideas of perfection, they would have done as Homer, Xenophon, Virgil, and all other writers of fiction have done. They would have given us as far as they were able, a graphic and striking representation of the virtues which were most in repute in their day; they would have clothed their hero with every attribute that could dazzle the imagination or call forth the patriotic

feelings of a Jew. And instead of the character of Jesus Christ, we should now have been furnished with the *beau idéal* of a proud and sanctimonious Pharisee, of an impious Sadducee, or of a quiet and abstemious Essene, according as the opinions of the writers led them to prefer one set of worthies to the other ; and at all events every Jew would have made the most exalted excellence to consist in bringing temporal deliverance to Israel and extending the boundaries of their kingdom to the extremities of the world.

Besides moral worth, there is another part of the character of our Lord which the evangelists never could have reached, we mean the wisdom which distinguished him from all the human race. This is a point which it is impossible to evade ; for it would be removing the difficulty only a single step, to deny the wisdom of the Saviour, if we must admit that in the writings of each of the evangelists, there are marks of wisdom which all the wise men of antiquity could never attain. There are doctrines and precepts in the New Testament which, even our enemies themselves being judges, cast into the shade all the wisdom of the heathen. Whence then came this wisdom, is the point of enquiry. To deny the character of our Lord does not explain the difficulty. Just as if any one wishing to decry the knowledge which the heathen really possessed in regard to religion and morality, were to assert that Xenophon and Plato had invented the character of Socrates and the doctrines which he taught, he would not have gained his object, because he would have been obliged to confess that Xenophon and Plato knew and held these doctrines, which would amount to the same thing in regard to the point at issue. On the same principle, if we deny the reality of the character of Christ, still we must admit that there were four obscure indi-

viduals endowed with such superhuman wisdom that we cannot account for the fact without supposing a miracle. And what is still more, this miracle would be wrought for a purpose the most derogatory to the divine government that we can possibly conceive, in order that a false history might be written and a false religion might be imposed on whomsoever might be most inclined, in all time coming, to pay the greatest reverence to the dispensations of providence.

Truly the religion of Christ must be a wonderful religion ; for whether we adopt it or reject it, we are led to the most marvellous conclusions. But as a belief of the truth of the Scriptures is the only course we can pursue without a violation of every rule of human testimony, without sapping the foundation of morality, and overthrowing every notion that we can form of the truth and perfection of the divine being, our wisdom will be to admit the reality of the character which the evangelists have published of their master and of themselves. According to their testimony he was the Son of God, and they were plain, honest men, who had no idea of bearing away the palm of inventive genius from the sages of Greece and Rome, but only testified what they saw and heard ; and were the humble instruments in the hand of God in proclaiming a system of truths, without which the world would still be in gross darkness, in regard to everything connected with religion and morals. If this be the conclusion to which we must come on a consideration of the character of Jesus Christ as a man, how overwhelming would be the conviction if we were to consider him in all his character as mediator, and in all that he has done for our fallen race. To say that the disciples could invent his history must be the effect of a wilful shutting of the mind against truth and reason.

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